

TRUST THE CURRENT HOLD FAST TO ONE ANOTHER - SPRING 2020 ISSUE



SPRING 2020, ISSUE XII
RIVERWISE

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Mission Statement

WHO

Riverwise is a community-based magazine created by a team of authors, writers, photojournalists, parents, grandparents, students, organizers, activists, artists, educators and visionaries. We are working together to create media that reflect local activism and the profound new work being done in and around Detroit neighborhoods. We envision deepening relationships through media that serve as an essential part of weaving beloved communities. We will celebrate personal Detroit stories and the process of evolving ideas.

WHY

It is often said that we live in two Detroits—one affluent, the other neglected. We know there are many versions of Detroit and in some communities there is a striving toward self-determination and new, visionary ways of life. It is our goal through this publication to show these efforts that are rooted in community—sustainable, transformative and based upon new forms of citizenship. Detroit is a movement city. And our movements need creative media. By sharing resources and encouraging open participation of engaged citizens, especially people of color, *Riverwise* shall help us to examine our own personal and political contradictions, and generate lasting solutions.

WHAT WE NEED

Riverwise needs your stories of resilience, visionary resistance, place-based education, self-determination and sustainable, creative ways of transforming yourselves and your communities. Please contact us with article ideas and notice of programs taking place in your neighborhood. We'll do our best to follow up.

Or submit an article, personal anecdote, poem, interview, photo, or illustration of your own for our next edition of *Riverwise* by July 22, 2020. We will do what we can to tell your stories. We won't be able to print them all. Some articles may also be printed in the *Living For Change Newsletter* put out by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership. Submissions should not be more than 1,500 words long and may be edited for content and/or space. They should also include contact information and proper credits and affiliations.

The *Riverwise* collective also invites you to join us for a series of community conversations. We hope to regularly discuss the direction of the magazine, story ideas and the future of our emerging Detroit communities with all interested parties. Please refer to the community calendar page at our website, www.riverwisedetroit.org, for more details.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

Riverwise magazine is partially grant-funded, but we need your help in order to remain free of charge and free of ads. We urge you to donate or subscribe to *Riverwise* visiting our donation page at riverwisedetroit.org. Checks must be made out to the *Riverwise* nonprofit fiduciary body, 'The James and Grace Lee Boggs Center.'

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Please contact *Riverwise* for permission to reprint any articles.

COVER ART

This issue's cover art was produced by Lauren Williams, a Detroit-based designer, researcher, writer, and educator who works with visual and interactive media to understand, critique, and reimagine the ways social and economic systems distribute and exercise power (www.williamslaurenm.com).

The cover art explores the mythology and reality of "two Detroits." Inspired by parallel dimensions, the division in this drawing is fictitious but its divisive power in reality is palpable. In one Detroit, long-time residents are deprived of basic human rights like water, housing, and quality education; in another, billionaires underwrite exclusionary redevelopment that places profit above all else. People move between these worlds with varying levels of fluency and agency. This drawing interrogates the space(s) between, atop, and beneath them in an effort to reflect narratives in this magazine about ongoing efforts toward self-determination and justice in Detroit.

A Matter of Survival

RIVERWISE EDITORIAL BOARD

The brutal murder of George Floyd has propelled thousands of people into the streets demanding a radical shift in the way that communities are policed.



Photos by Kevijyan Richardson

Worldwide protests, happening in the midst of a global pandemic, are forcing all of us to pivot more quickly than normal. While COVID-19 continues to ravage the health of our most vulnerable, younger, more active citizens have taken to the streets globally in protest of state brutality. It's an incredible moment.

The response across the country, in big cities and small towns, gives us hope that the current turmoil is preparing us for something even bigger. As street forums open up for public debate, larger segments of society are taking up the principles conveyed by the Movement for Black Lives. Mutual aid and compassion are paramount for those families stricken down by the coronavirus, and we are seeing a transformation of values needed to challenge entrenched systems. New leadership is emerging from an inclusive, multi-racial coalition which is focused on compassion and self-determination, rather than profit and exploitation.

The protests against police killings are supported by years of careful organizing and visionary thinking about community safety.

In Minneapolis, the Movement for Black Lives has been working on strategies to abolish police

in systematic ways. These efforts are ushering in new thinking around how to police our own communities on our own terms. Recently, the Minneapolis City Council declared that its police force would not only be defunded, but dismantled. In explaining the decision, the City Council said, "Decades of police reform efforts have proved that the Minneapolis Police Department cannot be reformed and will never be accountable for its action." Members of that Council have committed to a year-long process during which they will work with community organizations to identify community needs. They are calling for a reallocation of \$45 million of the Minneapolis municipal budget to insure crucial, beneficial community services.

Riverwise fully supports the abolition of police. Self-determination and community protection are critical elements for liberation. Here in Detroit, community safety, without police, has been advocated for years by such organizations as Black Youth Project 100, the Detroit Justice Center, Peace Zones 4 Life, and many others. Peace Zones 4 Life—conceived by the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality—was calling for these types of reforms in the '90s. Community security was the cornerstone of the Black Panther Party.

The continued loss of life, mass incarceration of Black people, brutalization by so-called law enforcement, the traumatization of our struggling communities—all of these injustices are now being looked at anew, on a national level. The abolition of policing as we know it is a conversation that is long overdue in America.

In our recent special issue on police surveillance in Detroit we featured one community initiative focused on self-determination in securing our neighborhoods—'Green Chairs, Not Green Lights.' This is the other side of defunding and radically reforming the police system. We need to restore our sense of community and mutual aid. Eastside Detroit residents have used the green chair as a symbol of unity and safety within neighborhoods as one way to rethink our responsibility to one another.

The way in which community pressure was applied to Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and the action of Minneapolis City Council also reminds us that democracy can only be created by our collective actions. We in Detroit are facing a far less responsive city government. Mayor Duggan and most on the Detroit City Council have failed to enact similar measures, refusing to take the lead from grassroots organizations that have advocated for more community resources to reduce crime and eliminate over-policing. It is clear we have to intensify our street protests toward a Mayor, City Council and Board of Police Commissioners who fail to challenge Police Chief James Craig on a number of issues, including police surveillance.

In a recent interview, Alex Vitale, author of the book, *The End of Policing*, said, "This is about rethinking our public political priorities and expressing that through a budget process that tries to lift individuals in communities up instead of criminalizing them."

This rethinking is creating a new consciousness about how to transform not only the police, but all the systems they have been put in place to protect. Through these efforts, the possibility of a new world is born.



Epilogue for the 21st Century

BY NANCY MERCADO

*Named one of 200 living individuals who best embody the work and spirit of Frederick Douglass by the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives and the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, **Nancy Mercado** is also the 2017 recipient of the American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement.*

*She is the editor of the first Nuyorican Women's Anthology published in *Voices e/Magazine*, Hunter College-CUNY. For more information, go to: www.nancy-mercado.com.*

And the demon took possession of the nation
Leading it by the hand in circles
Engaging in topsy-turvy talk
Weaving and unstitching gnarls of lies
Dangling morsels of doubletalk and innuendos
And the nation jumped
In attempts to capture those morsels
If only for a second
To distill them into reality
To identify them as black or white
But the demon
Kept changing the meaning of all things
Kept morphing his empty shell
Of broken bits of shiny shards
Of wickedness enshrined in glassy vials
And the nation contorting and heaving
Drowned in a melee of arguments
And weapons
And hurricanes
And earthquakes
And wildfires
And special reports
On the evening news
While the demon's henchmen
Went out into the world
And defiled the rivers
Defiled the women
Defiled the poor
Defiled all the good creatures of the earth
They were hell-bent
Maniacal in their derangement

They were the leaders of the free world.

Not one more

BY SHEA HOWELL

One week ago, we tried to grasp what it means to have lost more than 100,000 people in a little more than 100 days. How do we comprehend the depth of this horror? The sheer enormity of the pain and suffering of people makes it difficult to absorb. How do we grasp the stark racism carried daily in numbers reflecting the death toll in African-American communities far outstripping those in white, wealthier areas? Many of us felt our hearts could bear no more anguish.

When we saw Derek Chauvin kill George Floyd. Chauvin put his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck and held him down, squeezing the life out of him. Chauvin appeared calm and in control through the nearly nine-minute killing. He looked passively at the crowd urging him to back off. He was unmoved by the pleas of the man under his knee.

Chauvin and his accomplices enacted the killing that is essential to this country. It is the slow, calm and cruel certainty of death inflicted by white supremacy on black bodies, unmoved by pleas to justice and mercy. The death of George Floyd was caused by a sickness that goes to the very beginnings of this nation. It is the same sickness that has allowed this virus to kill so easily in communities of color. It is the sickness that has made the US the most violent nation on earth, the most capable of killing anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Ten years and a few days before George Floyd lay on the ground dying, seven-year old Aiyana Stanley-Jones was asleep on the couch as her grandmother sat beside her watching TV. The Detroit police Special Response team burst



Photos by Elaine Chiu for Frontline Detroit

through the doors of their apartment, threw flash grenades, and shot Aiyana through the head. The whole event was filmed for a reality TV show. Police tried to lie about Aiyana's murder, blaming the grandmother, claiming she attacked the officers, attempting to grab the gun. The police had invaded the wrong apartment. No one was convicted of any crime. It took almost 10 years for the City to acknowledge its responsibility to the family.

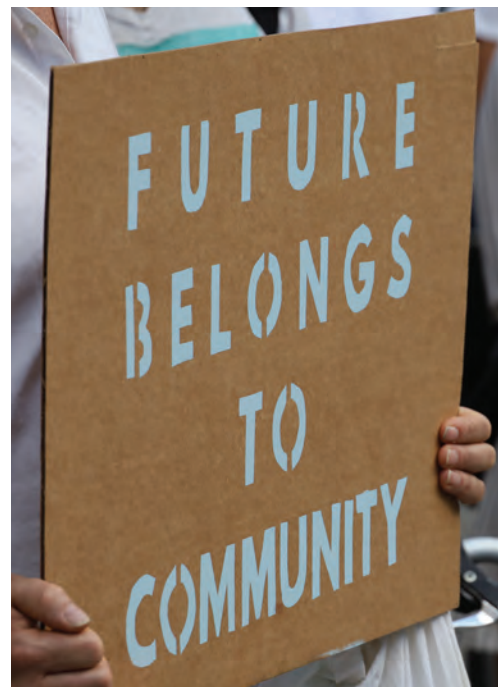
In the 10 years since Aiyana's death, the police—in Detroit and across the US—have learned nothing except how to kill more efficiently. They have learned that it does not matter if they wear body cameras. It does not matter if they are videotaped. It does not matter if they kill a child playing with a toy gun. It does not matter if they kill a man sitting in his car. It does not matter if they use force and violence. They can do whatever they want. They can squeeze the life out of a person—in front of the world—and walk away. More than 1000 people are killed every year by police. Disproportionately, their victims are African Americans.

Today, we need to say, *enough!*
Not one more person.
Not one more name.
Not one more life to mourn.

The police do not make us safe. They do not protect us. They began as the militias organized to kill indigenous people so white settlers could steal and hold land. They used these killing

skills to terrorize, trace, and capture African people resisting enslavement. They are sworn to uphold a legal system designed to protect property, not people. They should not exist in our communities.

It is time to dismantle the police and to provide for our own safety and security. During this pandemic, we have seen the power of compassion and care, the capacities we have to establish new ways of living that value life, connection and safety. We can create loving communities by creating real neighborhood safety, pledging to solve problems together, and learning how to live more peacefully. The corrupt, corporate state is failing all around us. We can and must take responsibility now for the life and health of our communities.



D-Town Farm

Food Justice and Sovereignty during COVID-19

BY SHAKARA TYLER AND PAUL JACKSON

Movements for food justice and sovereignty combat the realities of genocide and ecocide by building community food economies that are embedded in resiliently stewarded ecosystems. COVID-19 is the result of deadly pathogens mutating in, and emerging out of, industrialized agricultural environments, where the natural agroecological systems that foster symbiotic relationships between humans, plant and animal life have been obliterated. Industrialized agricultural systems have led to the deterioration of public health by imposing factory-produced homogeneous food in place of locally produced, healthy, diverse and climatically appropriate food. The multinational corporations rationalize such unsustainable and unjust systems of production, distribution and consumption. However, the path to food security, justice and sovereignty is through empowerment of 'the people' to grow food where they are and to gain control over the resources that are essential to their effort.



Photo by Malik Yakini

Under white supremacist structures— capitalism, patriarchy, and ableism— much of our community has been rendered dependent on food systems, food producers, and vendors who operate with and even profit from an indifference to the health of our environment(s) and to our health and wealth as Black people. Times of crisis heighten these real injustices in the areas of food access, affordability, and nutrition— food as healing. The circumstances in which we find ourselves due to the global outbreak of COVID-19— times of economic, medical, food, and resource scarcity—are just those kinds of exceptionally challenging times.

Nevertheless, these times offer an opportunity for capacity building and grassroots organizing. As availability of basic resources begins to shift and decline, many of us are relying on local mutual aid and community solidarity to get through as already meager resources dwindle. Growing food wherever possible is on the rise. Whether through “victory gardens,” liberated lots or backyard bounties, many of us are taking back our power as people imbued with the ancestral agency of communing with land to meet basic needs. As more people look to community organizations for needed resources and gain a new perspective on grassroots movement work, D-Town Farm, and by extension the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), is strategizing and adapting to the new circumstances.

D-Town Farm and COVID-19

D-Town Farm has adjusted our schedule and programs to keep our staff and communities safe. The farm is closed to volunteers and visitors; however, the farm staff is working to continue the systemic process of growing certain foods at certain times at certain sites. Our roadside farm stand will be closed until further notice. We are currently deliberating on the best marketing strategies for food distribution, given the wide-scale restaurant closures and the uncertain status of other food distribution channels, such as farmer's markets. Online food sales with a strict physical distancing pick-up policy will probably be our primary avenue of food distribution for the foreseeable future.

Challenges

Some of the challenges associated with these shifts in operations include acquiring both the necessary equipment to keep our farm staff safe (gloves, masks, etc.), and the technological tools needed to thrive with the increase of online business demands (hotspots, routers, etc.). Another significant challenge is responding to the gregarious needs and desires of our farm volunteers and visitors. Their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual

health is served through actively contributing to the work at the farm, and they are missing this engagement during this period. Though physical distancing is critical at the moment, our community thrives on social and environmental connections.

This is a time to rise up and support each other, not a time to retreat to our individual silos and await the worst. In response to times of systemic scarcity, we turn toward the abundance of us to meet our needs by sharing resources and knowledge. Through food resilience education and seed sharing, we are moving towards greater food independence as a self-determining community.

Food Resilience Education

D-Town Farm is cultivating Black community food resiliency through a series of online tutorials and distribution of seeds to our membership and others in need. We will produce and distribute video tutorials on how to grow food in urban settings, ranging from people in apartment buildings to folks with land access. D-Town Farm offers a broad-base curriculum to beginning growers and plans to make this curriculum accessible online. These videos are produced to offer mini-courses to anyone looking to begin growing food for

themselves, as food supplies suffer the strain of an economy that threatens to slow to a near halt.

Seed Sharing

We are sharing the seeds purchased from organic seed suppliers with members of our community who can grow food for themselves and their families, and even for their communities. Through a systematic approach to seed sharing, DBCFSN and D-Town Farm can help meet our heightened, collective food and nutrition needs during this period of social distancing and closure of "non-essential businesses." We are developing a product mix that will be distributed to beginning backyard gardeners, "window" planters, and experienced community growers.

Community-wide Mobilizing and Organizing

Other Detroit urban agricultural organizations have also stepped up during this crisis. Oakland Avenue Urban Farm has become a community distribution site for emergency food and disinfecting supplies. Ohana Gardens' staff are preparing nutrient-dense meals and delivering them to community members who have tested positive for COVID-19. Liberated Farms is providing consultations in urban garden and farm development along with food distribution in their neighborhood.

In this impending apocalyptic world that is shifting rapidly and dangerously for all of life, humans and non-humans alike, we must come to understand that our only true currency in these moments are seeds, water, soil, our knowledge sets and each other. As COVID-19 ushers in a changing world order, working towards food justice and food sovereignty is one of the most important political and artistic actions of our time, as we mend our broken relationship to ecosystems. To echo the sentiments of Nina Simone, "An artist's duty is to reflect the times.... When everything is so desperate and everyday is a matter of survival, we don't have a choice but to get involved."

So, who's feeding you?

shakara tyler is the Board President of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and **Paul Jackson** is a D-Town farmer.



Photo by Malik Yakini

Visit www.dbcfsn.org for more information about the work of the **Detroit Black Community Food Security Network** and how to use urban agriculture as a tool in building community self-determination.

‘She Safe, We Safe’: A New Focal Point For Black Liberation

BY ATINUSEWAKARAIYE “TINU” ROLAND

In the midst of a global pandemic that has forced myself and many others across the world to be at home, I have had the time to process my thoughts around what my work really means to me. I am an aspiring abolitionist & freedom fighter, and I will not rest until ALL Black people are free.

In reality, what does that look like as a praxis? How is this actually embodied? Sitting through a time of political turmoil and hella uncertainty the quote, “We are the ones we have been waiting for,” rings in my head over and over. Our time is now; our moment is now. So many of us throughout the world have realized that the systems of oppression that continuously dehumanize us as people have to be abolished, and a new way of living, through liberation, needs to happen. Unfortunately, oppressive systems did not manifest overnight, so there is no easy fix, but there are people in communities everywhere who are working towards our collective liberation. adrienne marie brown refers to us as emergent. She says, “Emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies. Emergence is our inheritance as a part of this universe; it is how we change. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.... In the framework of emergence, the whole is a mirror of the parts. Existence is fractal— the health of the cell is the health of the species and the planet.” I like to think that I am a fractal in the movement of liberating Black people.

Emergence is also how I view my work and the ways in which it all intersects and contributes to the ecosystem we are building in Detroit around liberation. My political home at BYP100 Detroit is an abolitionist youth organization that embodies the practice of ‘black queer feminism’. This principle asks, how can



Author ‘Tinú’ Roland and daughter Azaria, age 9, both with megaphones, leading the chant during the July 30, 2020, Green New Deal Rally at Cass Park. Photo courtesy of Tinú Roland

those of us with privilege empower those of us who experience more oppression based on being trans, queer, feminine, undocumented, poor, or disabled?

What that means to me is that those who are closest to the margins of society’s oppressed peoples have to be at the focal point of everything that we do. For far too long black women (trans and cis), girls, and gender non-conforming people have existed at the epicenter of social hatred, fueled by stereotypes and damaging societal standards.

This level of oppression reminds us that in order to get free we must take the Black Queer Feminist approach. My work in the organization is building out the Detroit Chapter as our Membership chair. I also am leading our ‘She Safe, We Safe’ (SSWS) campaign efforts in Detroit, a transformative movement campaign to address the gender violence impacting Black women and girls (both trans and cis), as

well as gender non-conforming people. We understand gender violence as something that happens both between individuals in communities, and as something that is perpetrated and sanctioned by the state. We define the state as the governmental institutions that organize society, such as law enforcement agencies, public schools, child protective services, welfare agencies, and public housing. During the current COVID-19 epidemic, this moment has allowed the reality of gender violence to be seen even more clearly.

Just recently I was made aware of an incident regarding a couple I knew. After several altercations and breakups, her life was taken by the person she chose to call her boyfriend. I found out about this incident after reading the news of a woman who killed her husband here in Detroit. The sad reality is, gender violence is not just domestic, it is perpetrated by the state and the interpersonal. This level of violence is seen in every facet of our existence.

Our 'She Safe, We Safe' campaign has allowed us to be the container of stories for those who are always silenced. One of the beautiful things I have found about the campaign is the way in which we love and support participants as they share their stories with us. During one of our kitchen table talks (small intimate group settings where we discuss how gender-based violence has shown up in our communities and in our lives), I received a text from a participant who was unable to make it, saying that she was going through a lot and was not coming to the event. I was understanding of her situation but it sat heavily on my heart. I called to talk with her after to find out her daughter had been suspended the prior week from school due to a bullying situation that not only was unresolved, but was progressing further— in addition to having a mentally abusive husband. This story is relevant to my thinking today as I reflect on these intersections. I also organize parents and youth with 482Forward; we do education advocacy and organizing throughout the city of Detroit, through neighborhood-based organizing. So, when I heard her issues I immediately jumped into organizing mode. As a parent myself, I recognize the school-to-prison pipeline our youth are on. I am also

able to recognize our communities' significant gaps in resources, teachers, food, mental health resources, true restorative practices, emotional intelligence, and cultural agility. Her story was not unique but it was valuable. I see disciplinary solutions that fail our youth everyday. Her daughter ultimately ended up being suspended for the remainder of the year due to half of the gaps I named.

See, I struggle a bit in this moment when I think of what that means. In a bigger picture that means a young person has been punished for protecting themselves when no one else would. This means that someone is currently at home from school with a parent who experiences different levels of gender violence and, sadly, someone who has been failed by our current systems. It baffles me how interconnected these issues are and that our people are still being forced to deal with this oppressive, sad reality— one that, even during a global pandemic, has not stopped. This is what makes the Black Queer Feminist theory important. It is the will to protect the most vulnerable at all costs.

When I think of what liberation looks like, it is the will to push far beyond what we know now. It is the emergence of something new that swarms together like little starlings. We are

here at the crossroads, the choice to decide whether or not "the future and liberation are the same thing" (Maria Ibarra). This is the moment that requires us to create our own ecosystem, and how we will choose to live. Our fractal existence is just that— a piece of our liberatory world. I challenge everyone to push past your comfortability levels and challenge your thinking— imagine a world where we all are free. There is no prison-industrial complex, nonprofit-industrial complex, 'isms' (i.e. capitalism), phobias (i.e. transphobia), attacks on K-12 education with a clear path to prison (school-to-prison pipeline), food insecurities, homelessness, or so many others that we all know we have a laundry list of in this current environment.

How do we begin to change our political climate in Michigan? We start within our communities, our organizations, and we make what is deemed impossible possible. We shift our energy and our focus, we no longer continue to play the

game of life the way our government has dealt it to us. We build our world the way we see fit and begin playing it that way, because that is what freedom looks like.

Last summer, BYP100 Detroit Chapter hosted a political education around hyper-surveillance in the city of Detroit (Project Greenlight). Our coalition is Greenlight Black Futures. We host political education in communities, designed to make space for participants to dream of a world where oppressions such as mass surveillance, food insecurities, and poor education are not factors.

Community members sat in the conference room at Focus:HOPE and dreamed of having access to mental health institutions; transportation options that are safe, clean and affordable; love and support in their lives; individuality (the right to be who you are and not have to constantly grapple with who you are and if it is ok); no pollution and misuse of the planet; a world where water and other earthly essentials are not owned by corporations but are given back to the land; access to affordable and quality education and childcare; and the elimination of food deserts (everyone has the access to fresh and healthy foods). Not only did community members dream, but they began creating a plan to shape and effect the change we want to see.

While in prison, Assata Shakur's sister wrote her a letter. Inside were some of the most powerful words of love and liberation I have read. She said: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and protect each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." What that means to me is that we need to continue to break systemic barriers, whether small or monumental. It is time to dream of our world, and then plan how we get free. We are in this thing called life together and the only way we win is collectively. People have suffered for hundreds of years, and continue to suffer to this day. We have nothing else to lose but the chains of oppression that bind us. What will I do? What will you do? How do we do it together?

Atinusewakaraiye "Tinu" Roland (*she, her, hers*) is a community organizer, a Black Political Strategist (through Black Queer Feminism, Abolition). She is a mother of three. She sits on boards around education advocacy, a host of committees and resides in Detroit, Michigan, where she is a frequent speaker, trusted advocate and devoted friend to those around her. Tinu's favorite quote is "We are each other's harvest, we are each other's business, we are each other's magnitude and bond."¹

¹ from poem, "Paul Robeson," by Gwendolyn Brooks, first published in the poetry collection, *Family Pictures*, Broadside Press, 1970



Photo by Valerie Jean

Fighting Racist Surveillance in Detroit

Flashing green lights let you know you're being watched

BY BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN

Reprinted with permission from Sojourners, March 2020, (800) 714-7474, www.sojournal.net.

We gathered this fall on the steps of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Summoned by the Detroit chapter of Black Youth Project 100, we were preparing to march a mile-long stretch of gentrified Michigan Avenue, which intersects there. I had served the church for 11 years as pastor, and in the last dozen or so this Catholic Worker neighborhood had been invaded by \$400,000 condos, plus destination bars and restaurants. Among others, guests at our Manna Meal soup kitchen and Kelly's Mission, largely black, are stigmatized and made unwelcome.

But the focus of the march was more than the gentrified influx: accompanying gentrification has been a heavy increase in electronic surveillance by the so-called Project Green Light, where businesses pay for street cameras that feed to a Real Time Crime Center deep in police headquarters. In areas like this, as with downtown, high surveillance makes white people feel safe for moving in or just shopping and dining.

Dan Gilbert, a mortgage, finance, and development billionaire, owns more than 100 buildings downtown, all covered with the cameras of his own Rock Security. They feed to his corporate center, but also to the police crime center. Detroit Public Schools has its own central command, which is not yet tied to the police center. Likewise, a separate system of streetlight cameras, and even drones, is under development. California recently banned the use of facial recognition software in police body cams, which would convert an instrument of police accountability into a device of surveillance. Michigan has not.

Most Project Green Light cameras are in Detroit neighborhoods, on gas stations, bars, party stores, churches, and clinics. There, each is marked with the constant flash of green lights that say: You are being watched. When the city demolished a house behind ours, we had to hang light-impervious curtains to prevent green pulsing on our bedroom wall from the funeral home a block away.

For nearly two years, unacknowledged, facial recognition software was being employed by the police department. The software can be used with a "watch list" of persons of interest, plus access mug shots, driver's license and state ID photos, and more—perhaps 40 million Michigan likenesses. A string of recent studies indicates the software can be inaccurate for dark-skinned people, creating false matches and prosecutions. A federal study released in December, according to *The Washington Post*, showed that "Asian and African-American people were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white men." Thus, resistance to the system quickly mounted in Detroit, which is 80 percent black.

There are two surveillance-industrial complexes. It's said the days are coming when nations will need to choose which surveillance network to join, the American or the Chinese version—parallel to military alliances. China has 200 million cameras focused on its people, but with 50 million, the U.S. has more cameras per capita. The best facial recognition technology is coming out of Chinese firms, but these are banned in the U.S. because of their connection to human rights abuses. The Detroit contract is with DataWorks Plus.

Orwell would be astonished

The Black Youth Project 100 march along Michigan Avenue was more like a dance parade, thick with drums, rhythm and chant: "Black Out Green Light." This stretch is a so-called Green Light Corridor, where all businesses participate, marked with modest and tastefully lighted signs. At each venue we passed—coffee house, bar, restaurant, bagel shop—three or four folks would go inside with signs and leaflets to chant and speak. A nonviolence training a couple weeks prior had prepared participants for the increasing police presence as the action proceeded. Squad cars blared sirens and officers stood by doorways, never blocking entrance, but threatening. Back at the church Rashad Buni of BYP100, which seeks "Black Liberation through a Queer Feminist Lens," called for surveillance funds to be spent instead on neighborhood investment—foreclosure preven-



Photo of Rev. Bill Wylie Kellerman by Valerie Jean

tion, job training, clean affordable water—as the real source of community security. We all want safe neighborhoods. The question he puts is: By what means?

The downtown vs. neighborhood experience of Project Green Light reflects a paradox in the new surveillance. On the one hand it is often not just normalized, but voluntary, welcomed, even paid for by those surveilled. Orwell would be astonished that we not only sit in front of laptops that stare back at us but pay for higher and higher resolution cameras that we carry around self-photographing and broadcasting our locations. Folks pay to turn their DNA codes over to Big Data corporations. We hand off our shopping lists in exchange for membership sale prices. For facial recognition, we tag photos of ourselves and friends to confirm what the software has already discerned, or take the "10-year challenge" on Facebook, potentially teaching algorithms to fine tune the processes of aging. We put on watches that track and broadcast our steps, heart rates, and blood pressure. We report our emotional states with elaborate emojis. We eagerly clamor for 5G, which will integrate all our personal data, from printer usage to thermostat settings and security controls. All of these are resistible to one degree or another, and I myself do so as I'm able.

On the other hand, surveillance occurs without consent, notification or permission. One big backdrop, of course, is the Patriot Act, which allowed the NSA (National Security Agency) to gather and store the phone calls, emails, and text messages of U.S. citizens, even gain backdoor access to your camera. With Project Green Light, anyone even passing by equipped premises is subject to capture and facial recognition. Business owners were never notified that their video feeds were being scanned by DataWorks Plus.

Among the businesses themselves, some have been eager for it, and others feel jammed as though it were a system of extortion, paying for police protection (up to \$6,000 upfront plus a \$1,600 annual fee) and setting up tiers as to who will receive prompt response. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan has announced plans to require it for businesses open in late hours. In Baltimore, which also has an aggressive facial recognition program, police scanned the crowds of those protesting the death of Freddie Grey, turning up matches and pulling people with outstanding warrants. It is only two years since Black Lives Matter was reputedly removed from the FBI list of “black identity extremist” organizations.

Though surveillance has always had dimensions both public and private, that distinction is all the more blurred. Project Green Light is a police department program, but it is contracted and funded by private businesses. Ring, Amazon’s surveillance camera division, which began with smart doorbells, has fashioned plans to use facial recognition software in its network of home security systems, creating neighborhood watchlists. Though the program is still in development, connections to local law enforcement are more than contemplated. Imagine residential feeds tied to real-time crime centers. Amazon’s related app, “Neighbors,” creates a residential surveillance social network to share and chat about suspicions. Notice that “neighborhood,” which needs to be built on relationship and trust, is thereby turned to signify a circle of fear and suspicion. A review of the app last year by Motherboard found that in a given period the majority of those reported as “suspicious” were people of color.

Being seen, not watched

Through the Detroit Community Technology Project, Tawana “Honeycomb” Petty was instrumental in conducting a study on community experience and perception with respect to personal data capture and storage. Petty wrote:

“[Detroiters] expressed experiencing difficulties in having a decent quality of life, based on the tracking and sharing of their information. If they couldn’t afford water, it followed them. If they couldn’t afford to pay tickets, it followed them. If they got into debt and missed payments on utilities, it followed them. They expressed feeling tracked and monitored. That one bad experience prevented good experiences in other areas. They expressed not feeling seen as human, only as a trail of data and bad decisions ... This feeling of being watched and tracked, but not seen, was further exacerbated by the implementation of mass surveillance in Detroit.”

In sum, she says, “Detroiters want to be seen, not watched.”

I read in that a theological assertion. Simply put, God sees; the powers-that-be watch. No coincidence that in Hebrew, the word for city, *‘iyir* or *‘iyir re’em* (arguably the earliest naming of the powers biblically), also means the “Watching Angel.” Is this not how Israel in its pastoral nomadism would spiritually name the walled ramparts of the ancient city-state? Its eye turned outward upon them? Constantly scanning the horizon for enemies, outlaws, and the unwelcome? But now the great eye turns inward as well.

There’s no question that historically the omniscience of God, combined with a fiery judgment, has been employed by monarchy and empire as rationale and extension to its own surveillance and sanction. The principalities and powers covet God’s knowing. Ultimately, they aspire to pre-empt, usurp, and supplant the omniscience of God, a presumption rooted in fear and objectification. (Technically, that’s blasphemy). Divine omniscience, however, the knowing of all things, is an estate of steadfast love. As the psalmist put it, “O God, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up ...

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?”

Surveillance capitalism

Writing in the 1970s, William Stringfellow, preeminent theologian of the powers, counted surveillance a stratagem and tactic of the demonic. He counted it as a debilitating method of rule. By his lights, “the prevalence of industrial and commercial espionage, the monitoring of shoppers” had so habituated human beings to being watched that “tolerance of citizens toward political surveillance and the loss of privacy” was normalized. “The kind of open society contemplated by the First Amendment seems impossible—and, what is more ominous, seems undesirable—to very

many Americans.”

Prescient as he was, he’d still be shocked by the extent to which “the private” has been not just invaded, but plundered and commodified.

The totalization of surveillance by the powers is not only technological but economic. A capitalist system devours new territory. Big Data is a realm currently unregulated and virtually lawless. As capitalism draws more and more things into the market, it commodifies them. Hence, as nature is turned to land and specifically real estate, or work becomes wage labor, so our personal and private human experience (collected and passed along by all those apps) becomes

[Detroiters] expressed experiencing difficulties in having a decent quality of life, based on the tracking and sharing of their information. If they couldn’t afford water, it followed them. If they couldn’t afford to pay tickets, it followed them. If they got into debt and missed payments on utilities, it followed them.... That one bad experience prevented good experiences in other areas. They expressed not feeling seen as human, only as a trail of data and bad decisions ... This feeling of being watched and tracked, but not seen, was further exasperated by the implementation of mass surveillance in Detroit.

Tawana “Honeycomb” Petty of the Detroit Community Technology Project

behavioral data rendered to be bought and sold, for the purpose of predicting behavior and even controlling it. Donald Trump was a buyer through Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 election, tailoring ads personally to Facebook users based on their own preferences and personalities—nudging opinions and votes, perhaps more so than Russian meddling. Read the fine print: Privacy policies to which we click “agree” are in actuality surveillance policies. We

think we are searching Google, but it is actually searching and mining us. All of this has been painstakingly detailed by Shoshana Zuboff in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

In surveillance studies, a primary historical image comes from 18th century utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who conceived the Panopticon (“all seeing”). The design for a prison in the round, all its cells opened inward to the center, where a tower with small windows could keep watch on convicts. At night cells would be lit by a combination of lanterns, mirrors, and windows, illuminating them round the clock. The tower did not even need to be occupied at all times, since the important thing was simply for prisoners to imagine and understand they were being watched. Moreover, Bentham envisioned it as a private prison, run by himself and employing the free labor of the prisoners for profit. Take it as one metaphor for the surveillance society.

Racist technology?

In her book *Dark Matters*, Simone Browne reads the panopticon in light of two other developments. One was the slave ship, a mobile, seagoing prison—precursor to the modern land-based prison. The other was the 18th century lantern laws of New York City that required enslaved people (Black, mixed-race, and Indigenous) to carry candle lanterns if they went about the streets after sunset unaccompanied by a white person. They were compelled to show their faces on demand, revealing who was in place and who was out. As Browne says, the legal framework of stop and frisk goes way back.

Can a software technology be racist? Of course it can. Just as white supremacy may be structured into institution, law, or policy, so it can be embedded in algorithms and the constructions of technocracy. Algorithms learn from human behavior, including its biases. Try teaching one to recognize suspicious behavior in front of the house and see who turns out most often to be “suspicious.”

In the present instance white supremacy prevails because whiteness is the normative baseline shading for recognition software. The error rate for people of color is especially dangerous in connection with a criminal justice system structurally stacked against them. The mugshot database is already disproportionately black and brown because of the way communities are policed. Mismatching multiplies criminalization. Last year, in an ACLU test, Amazon’s recognition software mismatched 27 professional athletes to individuals in a mugshot database. As Eric Williams

of the Detroit Justice Center put it, “If it were white people who were misidentified at the same rate as black people ... by this technology, we wouldn’t even be having this discussion. People would simply say, ‘Oh, it doesn’t work.’”

The weaponization of facial software

Facial recognition technology can readily be weaponized. The U.S. Army has put out a request to contractors for development of a new generation rifle with facial recognition capability. Two years ago, Stuart Russell of the University of California, Berkeley, who wrote an influential book on artificial intelligence, produced a seven-minute fictional video called “Slaughterbots,” in which a swarm of tiny drones equipped with facial recognition and firepower are released to accomplish targeted assassinations. Fearmongering? Such devices are possible, and *The New York Times* has confirmed witnessing a military test of Styrofoam bots on that scale. It’s simply a matter of combining existing technologies, in this case driven less by military desire than commercial interests.

There is no federal legislation regulating facial recognition software. Illinois was the first state to do so. Last year the state supreme court ruled that Illinois residents could sue companies under the 2008 Biometric Information Privacy Act for collecting such data (face and fingerprints) without permission. Facebook is in trouble there. San Francisco was the first major city to ban government use of facial recognition software. Somerville, Mass., and Oakland, Calif., have followed.

Building “relational security”

Detroiters had hoped to ban the use of facial recognition software here. Last summer the focus was on the Board of Police Commissioners, ostensibly a citizen review board that oversees police operations. When the software contract came to light after nearly two years of secret operation, the development of a policy to regulate usage fell to the board. Their meetings, often lively with community participation, now became regularly raucous. In one, the chair even ordered the arrest of another commissioner. A coalition—including the ACLU, Color of Change, CAIR Michigan, Detroit Justice Center, and the Detroit Hispanic Development Center—publicly urged the board to reject the use of this technology.

By September, a policy document had been refined. To confirm it meant sanctioning and accepting the technology already in place. In what has become emblematic of the commis-

sion’s attentiveness to community concerns, the board first approved the policy and then opened the floor to public comment. My own remarks to the commission, I confess, were rancorous, accusing the commission not merely of rubberstamping but covering up two years of virtual impunity by the mayor and the chief—employing the technology without public notice or accountability.

The struggle continues. Other systems such as drones and streetlight cameras will require their own policy directives by the commission. Though the city council’s record of standing up to the mayor is thin, it will take up the matter, opening the floor to more public action and discussion. A Detroit representative has introduced state legislation that would declare a five-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition, to let policy catch up with technology. And U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Detroit has introduced federal legislation prohibiting its use in public housing. Nonviolent actions of resistance will need to become more direct and creative.

Corollary to the theological distinction between being watched and being seen, there is an ethic of sorts as well. As means and end, it is the beloved community that sees and trusts, knows and loves. That is the base from which, and method by which, we struggle.

Several years ago, in response to events of police brutality, Peace Zones for Life were organized across the city—introducing community awareness, intervention, and conflict resolution as alternatives to aggressive policing for neighborhood security. One of those zones on the east side has now pioneered a project called “Green Chairs Not Green Lights.” Distributing chairs for elders and others to use on their front porches to keep a loving eye on the block, they propose neighborly solidarity and relational security instead of cameras and software. A principle of self-reliance and self-determination. An act of seeing and knowing. An ethic of beloved community.

Since COVID-19 and the social distancing order, the City has used Project Green Light surveillance to fine predominantly African-American Detroiters over \$2 million, whereas armed white extremists at the State Capitol were not fined at all. —ed.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann, a *Sojourners* contributing editor, is a community activist, author, teacher, and pastor in Detroit. His recent book, **Principalities in Particular: A Practical Theology of the Powers That Be** (Fortress Press) addresses surveillance.

Rejecting the blinders and secrets of racism

BY SHAUN NETHERCOTT

On the 4th of July weekend, 2019, Shaun Nethercott made the following presentation at the Community Unitarian Universalist Church in Brighton, Mich. Most members of the congregation were of Northern European background. —ed.

I am an artist, writer, producer, teacher, activist, and person of faith. I moved to Michigan from Wyoming in 1986, and to Detroit in 1988. Through my work as the founder of Matrix Theatre Company, and now as the executive director of the newly founded Center for Detroit Arts and Culture at Marygrove College, I have had the privilege of working with many diverse communities. However, doing this work has required me to learn many things— often the hard way.



On this 4th of July weekend, and having just returned from two weeks in Canada, I have been thinking about the promise and contradictions of this country. I have been meditating about the ways that I, as a person of conscience and creativity, have been learning to pierce the veil, to see some hard truths about race in our culture, and how I—and dare I say, we—need to learn to see when we have been taught to be blind.

Here are some facts that shocked me:

- Most WWII African-American veterans did not receive the GI Bill, and therefore did not get guaranteed mortgages, or access to college.
- Mortgages and business loans were not available in my Southwest Detroit neighborhood for the first fifteen years we lived there. Even now, when the news is that “Detroit is starting to boom” again, such loans go to newcomers, not those who have been here the last 10 years.
- Agricultural work and domestic work, two primary jobs that African Americans were allowed to hold during Jim Crow, did not pay into or receive Social Security.

I know how important education, secure mortgages, and Social Security have been within my family’s trajectory, and how it boosted my hardscrabble Irish, Norwegian, and Appalachian family members from their lives as laundresses, maids, drivers, heavy equipment operators and dirt farmers into the middle class as teachers and lawyers who had homes—and sometimes second homes. Their children, my nieces and nephews, are entrepreneurs, doctors, and bureaucrats. They have the secure types of jobs that allow them to take six months off to travel and return to work at the same pay grade and status.

Our grandparents earned their keep raising rabbits, washing clothes and shoveling coal. Their next day was never promised. They were renters, not owners; but both my husband Wes’s parents and mine had access to magic elevators which lifted them from poverty into the middle class.

Wes’s parents were the first in their family to go to college with the help of the GI Bill. My stepfather, orphaned at the age of 12, worked for the railroad during WWII, and was able to use that connection to get a mortgage and become the first in his family to own a home. My birth father died when I was very young. His Social Security survivors’ benefits kept our family together and eventually made it possible for me to go to college.

My husband’s family found their magic elevator in the Homesteaders Act, which gave settlers land if they built a small cabin and improved the land over a period of five years. With this land, they became OWNERS. And from their point of view, owners mattered more than people who were not owners.

Why did I not know that the programs that lifted my family were not available to Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans? In all the stories glorifying that homesteaded land, so proudly held by my relatives, there was never mention that the land in question had been expropriated by blood and fraud from the original native inhabitants.

I was raised in a coal-mining town in Wyoming—a town that celebrated its unusual ethnic diversity, especially when compared to the rest of the state, which is populated almost exclusively by Northern European Protestants. Our town had Slavs and Poles, Greeks, Italians, Brits, and Welsh, as well as Jews, Chinese, African Americans and Mexicans. Oh, we were so pleased to have Dragon Dances on Chinese New Year, but did we ever think to examine or talk of the racist roots of the 1890s Chinese Massacre in my hometown?

I lived a few blocks from the city cemetery, and I would often cut through it on my way to or from visiting my best friend. I enjoyed reading the grave markers and wondering about the stories behind the engravings. My trip would take me past a small fenced cemetery inside the city cemetery. I would open the gate to go peer at the tall obelisks marked with undecipherable Chinese characters, and read the date, September 1885. I knew as many as 40 miners were killed then— either killed or chased into the desert to die. Seventy-eight homes were burned down. This historic assault was never discussed among us townspeople.

And why did no one ever talk about why our little town had districts known as Chinatown and Niggertown down on the banks of the Bitter Creek, on the flats where that desert stream was most likely to flood? Why did all the people with European backgrounds, especially those with English, Scottish, or German last names, all live up on the hill and work as superintendents, merchants, and managers?

I ask now, why was all this not discussed? But truly, did we even see the pattern? Why did we not see the pattern of discrimination? We chose to believe that prejudice and bigotry were wrapped in slavery, and slavery had been abolished. Beyond that, we didn't look or talk.

In 1965, African-American novelist and essayist James Baldwin noted, "the reason for this ignorance is that [such] knowledge ... would reveal more about America to Americans than Americans wish to know."

Why didn't I notice that the two Lees in my class, John Lee and James Lee, had very different life journeys? Both their grandfathers had come to town as railroad workers. James Lee was outgoing, a natural leader, the president of our class in junior and senior high. John was shy, small, nerdy—a watcher rather than a doer.

Where are they now? John Lee is the president of an important regional petroleum distribution company. James Lee is dead. Arrested under suspicious circumstances, he died of what was called a "suicide" after a short stay in the local jail. Do I even need to mention that John Lee is European-American and James Lee was African-American?

The reason for this ignorance is that [such] knowledge ... would reveal more about America to Americans than Americans wish to know.

—James Baldwin

son of Martha, who lived on my grandfather's property. When my mother was banished from the family for being difficult and hardheaded, she was given the humiliating punishment of being sent to work the fields and live with Aunt Martha.

I heard these stories for years, but didn't understand them. I was in my forties before it dawned on me that Martha and John were my grandfather's second family.

Part of my ignorance about that family and other relatives can be attributed to the fact that my mother ran away from the South. I was raised in an atmosphere as far as possible from the Gothic complications of race and family relations in the South. But even so, we would occasionally visit those southern relatives. I met John as an older man. I heard stories of Aunt Martha. Not one of my relatives ever called these people our relations. But they were. When I asked my mother, she confirmed it, and was surprised I didn't already know.

There's more.

Strom Thurmond, a notorious segregationist senator from South Carolina, is my not-so-distant relative. His mother and my great-grandmother were sisters. Later in Thurmond's life, after he had upheld racist policies for years, it became public knowledge that he, too, had a second family. Now, through the good efforts of my cousin Bobby, those cousins are being invited (and coming!) to family reunions.

One more: on the morning of 9/11, I was in a meeting with a lovely brown-skinned woman newly moved to Detroit to work for the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan. We were talking about family background and she told me she was from Calhoun, Georgia. I replied, "I have a bunch of cousins from Calhoun, Georgia! What's your family name?"

"They're Meadows."

"That's my family's name, too." As we talked a bit more, we discovered that she and my first cousins shared a common grandfather. When I asked my mother about this, she said the relationship was entirely possible, because her sister's father-in-law was a known "rounder and his father was even worse."

When I tell these stories, and think of the denial, the silences, the enforced obliviousness at their core, it is easy to see why James Baldwin described "white people as the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing."

This madness, this not seeing, this not knowing, this structure of cultivated ignorance, innocence and obliviousness, is the grease that runs the machinery of American oppression and genocide. You may think my story is exceptional. It is not. I am here to tell you that it is your story as well.

This madness, this not seeing, this not knowing, this structure of cultivated ignorance, innocence and obliviousness, is the grease that runs the machinery of American oppression and genocide. You may think my story is exceptional. It is not. I am here to tell you that it is your story as well.

We all suffer from what Robin DeAngelo calls "delusions of individualism and meritocracy," supported by "segregation in our schools and neighborhoods, narrow and repetitious representations of people of color, [and] depictions of whiteness as the human ideal." This misinformation is reinforced by "truncated history, jokes, warnings, and taboos about talking openly about race and, let us not forget, white solidarity." These are the frameworks of white dominance into which we are socialized and which we have been taught not to see, not question.

I came across a document written by Peggy McIntosh in 1988, describing “white privilege,” listing more than 50 ways in which light skin works as an advantage and/or dark skin as a disadvantage. The description is more than 30 years old. Why does it seem that it could have been written last week?

I want to point out that the term “white privilege” is a “weasel word.” It sounds like something in-born and to be envied and sought. The use of it contributes to the problem— by hiding the role of choice, systems, and personal gain in the creation of white dominance. We should instead call white privilege what it is: “the invisible systems conferring racial dominance for people deemed to be “white,” in other words, the practices and policies of white dominance.

Here are some of the ways, identified by McIntosh, in which white dominance is reified:

I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained... to mistrust.

If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would like to live.

I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

When I am told about our national heritage or “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

I can go home from most meetings or organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, out-numbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated....

I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.

All of these are “circumstances I did not earn, but that I have been made to feel are mine by birth, by citizenship, and by virtue of being a conscientious law-abiding “normal” person of good will.”

All are comforts we as European-Americans—those designated as “white” within the system of white dominance into which we have been socialized—take for granted. We expect to be comfortable, and to be welcome wherever we go. We have been taught to think of ourselves as normal.

I am going to offer a slight diversion before telling you a couple of stories about who gets welcomed or not. You note I use the term European American instead of “white.” I use it to describe my ethnic and cultural background, just as someone might say African American, or Asian American. I do this because “White” is not an ethnicity. “White” is a status in the system of white supremacy. I am not “white.” I have been given white status.

My husband and I love to travel, often by bike or by hiking. This means we often look quite rough and even raggedy. However, we have always thought we could go in anywhere—a dive bar on the railroad tracks, a mom and pop café in a little town, or a white tablecloth restaurant in a big city, and expect to be served and treated with respect.

We were traveling with Workers’ Lives, Workers’ Stories, a professional storytelling troupe, on our way to DC to perform. Midway through Pennsylvania, my husband suggested the troupe stop in a little town off the turnpike and find a homegrown café for a break.

“No way,” said the several African-American members of the troupe. “We will stop at one of the designated stops on the turnpike.” Wes asked, “But that is all big chain plastic food. Wouldn’t you like something more homegrown?”

Pause. Pause.

“We can’t go someplace like that.”

“Why?”

“We have no idea how we will be treated. We can’t take the risk.”

Oh.

Another experience: We were still pretty new to Detroit and were taking a group of teens from Southwest Detroit and River Rouge to a retreat in a small town about 100 miles north of Detroit. We were still some ways from our destination, but had been traveling a few hours. The retreatants, mostly African-American and Latino young men, were getting restive and needed to use the restroom.

The bus driver pulled off the freeway, and spotting a small shop next to a wooded lot in a small village, stopped the bus. The kids jumped up, ready to run into the shop, use the restroom and buy some junk to eat. The driver, a middle aged African-American woman, jumped up and screamed at them. “You can’t go in there! They will shoot you!”

One kid mumbled, “But I have to go to the bathroom.”

She said, “You better use the woods.”

Wes and I sat there stunned, thinking the neighbors will probably be appalled by a bunch of black and brown kids peeing in the woods next to their house. Did we say anything? No. Did we do anything? No.



If we had known then what we know now, we would have acted differently. As the only European-Americans on the bus, we should have gone into the store and spoken to the shop owner about the kids and their need to use the restroom. We could have engineered a humane solution that recognized the needs of the kids, the store owner, and the neighbors. But we sat there, watching the kids get traumatized and terrorized by the bus driver whose own fear was so palpable. We could have entered that gap of racist tension, to intervene with the storeowner — or to make sure that the people in the town didn't see the kids' actions as disrespectful in the minimum or uncouth at the worst. But we didn't. We sat that one out. We sit it out a lot. When our relatives say and do obnoxious racist things, all too often we bite our tongues. We don't want to upset anyone.

But as James Baldwin notes, "It demands great force and great cunning to continually assault the mighty and indifferent fortress of white supremacy."

But the time has come to pull the blinkers from our eyes. In this era of Trump, and the daily assaults on our democracy, we can no longer guard and protect these delusions about who we are and what the system does to other people who, after all, are our neighbors, relatives, and friends. We cannot respect ourselves as a country or a people if we do not live the way we say we do, and if we do not enact the values we say we believe in.

As a nation, we are facing a spiritual crisis. The spiritual state of any nation controls the political institutions. We must face the cruelty, the exclusion, and the bigotry so obvious right now, and know that it was always there. It is the way it was set up and the way it continues to run. It is always there because we are trained not to look, not to see, not to talk and, most of all, not to understand what is manifestly present all around us.

Just as Baldwin said in 1965, "Privately, we cannot stand our lives and dare not examine them domestically, we take no responsibility for (and no pride in) what goes on in our country; and internationally, for many millions of people, we are an unmitigated disaster." (Baldwin p. 89)

What makes us think we as European Americans have the right "to feel at home in the world" and escape the penalties of "fear, anxiety, or a sense of not being welcome" regularly visited on other peoples of the world and our community? What can we do to build a culture of "belonging"? What can we do to make belonging a universal human experience?

We must redesign social systems—re-think and re-design the political, social, emotional, and psychological practices, policies, and laws that allow predatory lenders to provide mortgages in cities like Detroit and Flint, which allow for the seizure of someone's house if they don't pay their water bill, which deny the reality of poisonous tap water in Flint.

We can no longer NOT SEE. And you know what else needs to stop?

We can no longer expect the people being damaged by practices of white domination to be the ones to fix it. The problem is our lazy, self-interested collusion, which puts us on the glide path, but throws up obstacles at every turn for everyone else. This is our problem and our obligation to fix it.



And here I will offer my last quote from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*:

What it comes to is that if we, who can scarcely be considered a "white nation," persist in thinking of ourselves as one, we condemn ourselves... to sterility and decay, whereas if we could accept ourselves as we are, we might bring life to the Western achievement and transform them."

If we are able to do that, to see ourselves as we are, we can "achieve our country, and change the history of the world.

This is our choice and our chance. Let us seize this opportunity to build a culture of belonging of which we will be proud. Then we will be able to sing in full and true voice, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found— was blind, but now I see."

Notes:

Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage International Editions, Random House, 1962, 1963, and 1993.

Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.

McIntosh, Peggy, "White Privilege, Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences," Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 1988.

Dr. Shaun S. Nethercott is an activist, artist and Southwest Detroit resident. She was deeply involved with planning, devising, and implementing the pilot Participatory Budgeting process from October 2017-June 2018. Founding director of the Matrix Theatre Company, she is now executive director of the Center for Detroit Arts and Culture at Marygrove College. Images featured in this story are by Lauren Williams.

Citizen group resists Grand Prix

A summer of serenity on Belle Isle

BY MEMBERS OF BELLE ISLE CONCERN

All photos on this spread were captured by Kenneth Smith.

Belle Isle's historical role as a getaway for Detroit residents has never been more vital than now. In these days of 'sheltering in place', or working in an 'essential' role, having access to fresh air, solitary activities and relaxation is vital.

In addition to local citizens, wildlife and plants depend on the serenity found on Belle Isle. This summer we'll all get an opportunity to flourish without one major disruption. Due to the COVID-19 ban on large gatherings, the annual Grand Prix auto race has been cancelled. Instead of seeing a third of the island filled with construction crews, fencing, concrete barricades, race noise and bleachers, Detroiters will have access to the island in its entirety. For the animal population who inhabit Belle Isle, the island will be a more viable breeding and hunting ground.

Protecting the island and its life has been the goal of Belle Isle Concern, a grassroots group of citizens who oppose the running of the Grand Prix. We believe Belle Isle is a public park, not a racetrack or venue for exploitation, restricted access and commercialization by private interests. We will continue to speak up for the park and keep a watchful eye on the island.

Belle Isle is threatened by more than just the race. Currently, high water levels have flooded large swaths of the island, disrupting several state-led restoration and beautification projects. But the bigger concern is the way in which this treasured asset was transferred into the hands of the State. Since the capture of Belle Isle, the state is managing the island as they do other state parks, including charging a fee to enter, and eluding city oversight altogether.

Before the state takeover, Belle Isle was free to all and was filled with recreation, food concessions, swimming, as well as a number of family event opportunities. The members of Belle Isle Concern hope to return the island to its best health and greatest good for the greater Detroit community. Belle Isle Concern will be out to resist the Grand Prix in June 2021, and in the meantime we will make sure to use our voices to speak up for the island's open accessibility to all. We hope to remove the Grand Prix race on a permanent basis and free Belle Isle from Michigan State Park control and management. Belle Isle deserves to return to city oversight and offer the island-friendly activities that allow visitors of all species to freely visit for rest and recreation.

Sincerely,

Alyson Jones Turner

Sandra Novacek

Angelo Lugo-Thomas



To voice your opposition to holding the Detroit Grand Prix on Belle Isle, visit www.change.org/p/city-of-detroit-michigan-state-of-michigan-citizens-against-the-detroit-grand-prix-on-belle-isle.



Just Sayin'

BY MICHELE GIBBS

I DEPENDS WHO YOU AXIN'

Are you sheltering in place?
"You bet," says the brother,
replacing the manhole cover.
By the way ...
who was THAT masked man?

The experts warn:
"Congregating is unacceptable."
Meanwhile, face coverings would be good,
but how about four walls, a roof and a door?
not to mention clean water.
and please don't beat me more
for being out on the street after curfew
getting food for my family
and meds for my mom.
I APOLOGIZE !!
the line took too long.

Oh, so now you go treat me
like Amazon did Chris Smalls?
Kill me if I work without protective gear
and fire me for speaking this fear?!
... and since I just got evicted
for not having the rent,
I guess the next step
is a tent.

In New Orleans
70% of the dead are Black.
Chicago, too.
Detroit be #3 as a viral host.
Those with the least
are ravaged the most.
This savagery is
our underlying and pre-existing condition:
both essential and expendable
at the bottom of this system.

So, what else is new?
It will get worse
for more than a few.

"April is the cruelest month" ...so far.

II A GRAVE SITUATION

Now, it's cyclone and tornado season —
floods and lights out
for eight southern states.

Those in prison (70% not even charged)
already locked down are now locked in
with others infected,
sent to join them in the bin.
and for immigrant children,
still in detention doubly grim:
NO WAY OUT and NO WAY IN.
Government policy seems to be
"Let them all die — equally."

And, come to think of it,
as the body count mounts
and mass graves multiply
WHY? are they burying the dead,
not burning them
in ground where, in time, the virus will revive?

The slaughter houses are just that
for workers processing already dead meat
in lines and vats.
and being poisoned from pesticides
on a daily basis besides
are those responsible producers and providers
of our plant-based food supply —
Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Haitians,
harvesting the land with infinite patience.
Otra vez / pli mal.
Essential and expendable.

Essential and
expendable.

"April is the cruelest month" ...so far.

In this equation
the U.S. is quite dependable.
In this instance
making it the epicenter
of the world's public health debacle.

So stay tuned.
There will be more
than any of us have bargained for.
Those who thought themselves immune
are at the center of decay.
22 million new unemployed today.
22 block-long lines nationwide
for food-bank giveaways.
Proposed national reopening
for business as usual
spurred by Trump
from the isle of denial
means rolling back environmental protection regulations,
reopening gyms, spas, bowling alleys, beachfronts
and sports stadiums.
In Georgia, hair salons are recommended
for keeping one's head.
In other words,
CIRCUSES BEFORE BREAD.

There will be more
than any of us have
bargained for.

"swabs to the rescue," says the President,
with scarce test results unreliable at 30%
unemployment at 20%
and over 60,000 dead.

What else is there to say?
It is no help to be clever.
The government in power
is using this pandemic to clear the way
to eliminate all who get in their way
and blame the bug
for their own criminality.

III M'AIDEZ / MAYDAY / S.O.S.

This is a test:
Can one of the most literate populations in the world of all
read the writing on the wall????????????????????

The slaughter houses are *just that*
for workers processing already dead meat
in lines and vats.

Detroit was Michele Gibbs's home for many years before she moved to Oaxaca, Mexico, where she has continued her engagement as a political organizer, writer, performance artist, painter and sculptor. Gibbs returns to Detroit annually to rejoin friends, perform, and exhibit her work.

KAN Illuminate Student Deena Allen Wins Award for Poetry

BY NZINGA LEJEUNE

Deena Allen, a 17-year-old Detroit poet, recently competed against other high school artists to win the \$25,000 Detroit Pistons Black History Month Poetry Scholarship. A self-published author, Deena is a senior at Cass Technical High School. I spoke with Deena about her love of poetry, her passionate sense of community, and her inspiration to compete for the scholarship.

Tell us about the award you just won.

I won the \$25,000 Detroit Pistons Black History Month Poetry Scholarship.

How was the competition conducted?

It was a competition with about 14 poets and 14 poster artists. First the artists went on stage to display their posters. The other half of the competition was a poetry slam. The poets had to go on stage and recite our poems in under two minutes each. It was truly an interesting experience.

Tell us about the experience of competing?

It was really nerve-racking. My teacher told me about the competition the day before the application was due. That night she texted me about the scholarship opportunity and said she thought I might have a poem that would fit. So I filled out the application and was told the next day to be ready to compete at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA). I had to memorize the poem that night. It was also nerve-racking because I had to compete last. You go up there, you perform, then you have to wait. It was terrifying. After waiting two hours, they called us on stage and said my name as the winner. It was surreal.

During your performance, you gave a shout-out to the *illuminate* program at KAN Books. Tell us about *illuminate*.

Illuminate is a poetry and entrepreneurship program for Detroit youth that teaches not only how to create and sell your work, but also how to express yourself. I think that's where it all started. I started writing my poem when I was 12 years old, and I kept working on it every single year. So yea, *illuminate* is a really amazing program for the youth.

Where do you all meet?

We meet at KAN Books, 9405 John R and Kenilworth, and we have open mics every fourth Saturday at 6:00 p.m.

What are your favorite subjects in school?

English and Science, but I also like my acting classes.

Who's your favorite teacher?

My Japanese teacher. She's amazing!

What do you like about poetry?

I really like poetry because it's a good way to get how I'm feeling across. I've always had a hard time conveying how I feel in a healthy manner. So poetry helps me.

Who's your favorite poet?

Elizabeth Acevedo is my favorite poet. She wrote *Beastgirl and Other Origin Myths*; but I also like the poem "Lazy Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath.

Tell us about growing up in Detroit.

It's really interesting seeing everything change and shift. I like the adventure of Detroit — like going to the River Days, Belle Isle, and going to the riverfront and meeting new people. I really like the sense of community.

HEAVEN BY THE TEXTBOOK

By Deena Allen

i am the product of overpopulated classrooms and underpaid teachers
 10 dollars per student i'm closely calculating the cost of admission
 that our lives never calculate to enough. i'll let you do the math
 because the body count only matters on count day
 the 10 dollars isn't amounting to change
 because you're tardy
 because you're absent
 because you're slacking
 it's because you're not focused
 how much is my education worth to you?
 is it worth the fear of shattered glass and gun shot wounds
 how much is my education worth to you?
 is it worth failing me because i'm constantly struggling from work to worksheet
 how much is my education truly worth?
 in a public school system its education education education education
 when will we amount to enough?
 why is it so hard to get an education? It's
 from the creaks under the floorboards
 the mold in the ceilings
 from our lost dreams
 you can feel the woodchips in our sides
 it's the possibility of suspension to success and angel wings
 i've been in the school system all my life
 the product of generations of degenerates and hope
 That one day we will amount to enough change to make sense out of everything
 We are the youth built on the back bones of dreamers and believers and sky seekers
 That one day I will have the ability to make a place for myself.
 That's way more than 10 dollars worth.

In 10 years, what do you want your life to look like?

I want to double-major in forensics and performing arts. I really like acting. Hopefully, I'll continue to write poetry and self-publish while advocating for people who can't advocate for themselves.

Tell us about the book you have published.

Yea, I've written a book entitled *Infinite*. It's available at KAN Books and Amazon. I'm working on a new book entitled *Black Flowers Don't Exist because We Aren't Born Soft*, and I'm really excited about my upcoming book.

Excellent! What are you going to do with the \$25,000 scholarship you just won?

That's hard. I've applied to twelve different colleges and been accepted to seven. I might go to Wayne State University, NYU, or University of Texas in Austin.

Any last thoughts about winning the \$25,000 Detroit Pistons Poetry Slam Competition?

I think it's a big change for me, and even though I had doubts, I came out on top. So, I think just not giving up and not letting self-doubt get to you is important.



Detroit Pistons Black History Month Poetry Scholarship winner Deena Allen, left, with from left to right, Detroit Piston Derrick Rose, Imari Deadrick and Charles Dolton, Jr. Photo courtesy of Deena Allen.

NZINGA LEJEUNE is the author of a poetry book, a children's book, and producer of a documentary-short, all titled *#WaterINJUSTICE*. For more information, visit www.waterinjustice.com. Video of Deena Allen's winning performance can be found on YouTube. Allen's book **INFINITE** is available on Amazon. The illustration featured here is by Lauren Williams.



Connected

by Navjeet Kaur

18x20 inches

watercolor, black tea, and charcoal on paper

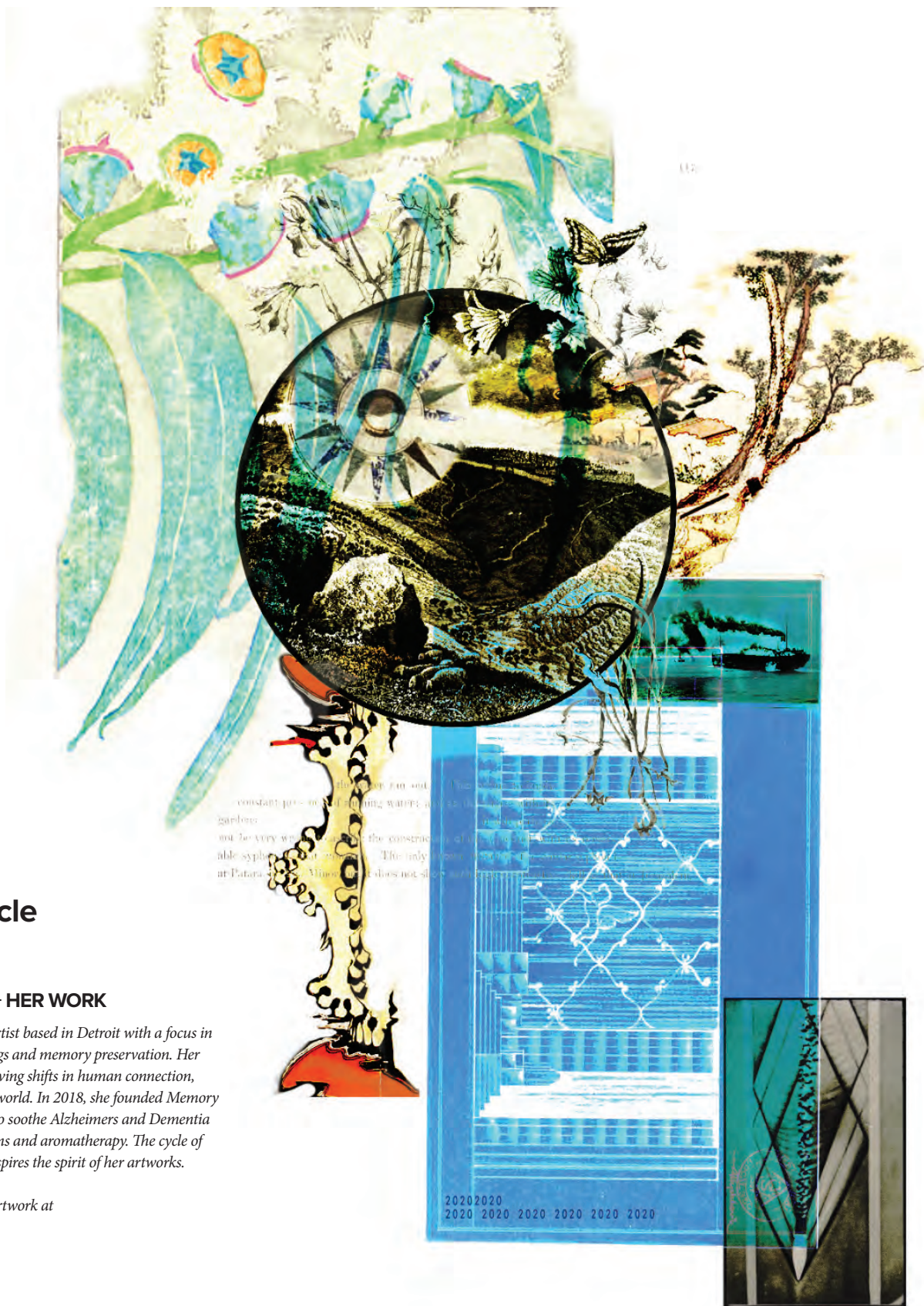
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Navjeet Kaur is an artist from Detroit, Michigan. In 2016, she received her BFA in Fine Arts and BA in Communication Studies at Wayne State University. Being from a Punjabi-Sikh family and identifying as that herself, she feels that it is important to address topics of intergenerational trauma, decolonization, and resilience through remembering in her work. She plays an active role in the art community of Detroit by exhibiting her work and working with youth groups. Currently, she is a full-time art teacher, teaching grades 2–10 in the Wayne County Detroit area.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work is an ongoing exploration of my Punjabi ancestral history, past and present. I explore concepts of harmony and chaos existing within the body and spirit through maternal connections, identity, home, and belonging. Paintings and sculptures replicating the earth, body, and nature become metaphors for ancestors, love, and culture. With all the injustices that are happening in the world, I feel that art has been my way to take care of myself and others. Art heals, creates community, and brings people together. This is what I hope to put out in the universe when I make art and also when I teach.

You can find more of Navjeet's artwork at www.navjeet-kaur.com.



The Glass Circle

by Chloé Hajjar

ABOUT THE ARTIST + HER WORK

Chloé Hajjar is a new media artist based in Detroit with a focus in digital techniques, live recordings and memory preservation. Her work acts as a reflection of evolving shifts in human connection, digital spaces, and the natural world. In 2018, she founded Memory Arts, a group program guided to soothe Alzheimers and Dementia through organic gesture, patterns and aromatherapy. The cycle of remembering and forgetting inspires the spirit of her artworks.

You can find more of Chloé's artwork at
www.chloehajjar.com

Continuing a legacy of community commitment

“Bailout Day” Frees Black Mothers

BY NICK BUCKINGHAM



Campaign Director and author Nick Buckingham pictured front, second from right, with active members of Michigan Liberation. Photo courtesy of Nick Buckingham and Michigan Liberation

Michigan Liberation is a statewide grassroots organizing group focused on transforming the criminal legal system across the state. We believe that people who have been incarcerated, and their loved ones, are the best leaders of this work. One of our main focuses is training and developing these leaders. Since our establishment in 2018, we have been instrumental in developing campaigns to register incarcerated individuals to vote in both Wayne and Genesee counties. We are currently building momentum to mobilize this population for key races later this year. We are also committed to political education about voting rights, particularly for those people who have been imprisoned or are still trapped in the probation and parole systems.

In Spring 2019, Michigan Liberation organized a Michigan Black Mamas Bailout Day, demanding freedom for Black mothers in Michigan prisons. These women were jailed solely because of the immoral and unconstitutional practice of money bail. The Bailout Day inspired community action, highlighted the role of profiteers in the bail bonds industry, and exposed the massive underlying social inequities that ensnare individuals in the criminal legal system. In 2019, we were able to allocate \$30,000 and bail out 15 women, connecting them to their families and resources.

Bailout Day is rooted in the history of Black liberation, where enslaved and free Black people used their collective resources to purchase each other's freedom. Until the practice of caging human beings is abolished, we will continue to find ways to get our people free. Our teams were able to secure the release of Black mothers in three Michigan counties: Wayne, Oakland

and Kalamazoo. With the recent public health crisis surrounding the outbreak of COVID-19, we've commenced a rapid response online fundraising campaign for a mass bailout of Black mothers who are left behind in jails and detention centers, and are at an increased risk of being exposed to the virus. The campaign has raised over \$5,000 as of May 1, and we hope to soon meet our goal of \$60,000. Additionally, we have sent a letter to Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer demanding that her administration do more to mitigate the health crises threatening incarcerated people across the state.

People can learn more or get involved at miliberation.org. We will be having weekly webinars and political education sessions via Zoom. We are creating our weekly calendar now. People can also find us on Facebook at **MiLiberation** or online at www.miliberation.org

The Bailout Day action has furthered our quest for transformational change across the criminal legal system in Michigan, and our commitment to making it happen. We know through the bailout and through our own experiences that many Detroiters are stopped on the Oakland County border as they travel through the Detroit-metro area. Suburban courts fund themselves on the backs of Black people and poor people in surrounding counties. We are seeking to attack this process through our Innocent Until Proven Otherwise and Community-Determined Public Safety workgroups. These workgroups are part of our statewide agenda designed to radically reimagine each system that touches people navigating the crisis of mass incarceration. Our agenda, Vision for a Liberated Michigan, was created entirely by our base in November 2019. We held town-hall meetings and developed this platform in response to community demands. It serves as the framework for all of the work that we do.

Through our work in grassroots communities, we have identified the need for gender-responsive services, specifically for women and trans and gender nonconforming people, focused on securing housing, transportation to and from court, childcare, and job placement. Michigan Liberation is calling for the creation of needs assessment, wraparound services—including mental health and drug treatment care—to support people fighting their cases and working to build safe, healthy lives for themselves and their families.

We are empowered by the people we reach through our organizing to build the world that we know is possible. We are focused on healing our communities from the pain and trauma caused by the oppressive systems of mass incarceration. We envision a new way of living and fighting for policies that will bring us closer to a new world and towards creating our own systems that recognize the humanity of all of us.

Nicholas Buckingham is the Campaign Director for Michigan Liberation. Michigan Liberation is a 501(c)(4) statewide organization dedicated to the leadership development of formerly incarcerated people and creation of effective campaigns to advance racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice in Michigan.



Great Lakes Activists Continue Fight Against DTE Nuclear Reactor

BY JESSE DEER IN WATER

Photo courtesy of Jesse Deer In Water

For more information, or to sign up for our newsletter, feel free to contact **Jesse Deer In Water** at changethelifeoftheworld@gmail.com or **James Sherman** at jimsherman@comcast.net.

Siyi, tohitsu? Hello, how are you? A common greeting amongst my peoples in Northeast Oklahoma, The Tsalagi (Cherokee) and Keetoowah; a place where I was introduced to the impacts of the nuclear industry through firsthand experience within the community impacted by the Sequoyah Fuels uranium processing plant located in Sequoyah County, Oklahoma; also home to some of the sacred ceremonial grounds and Cherokee communities. Though I know that settler colonialism and the nuclear industry have direct ties, the story is long and at times endless. I haven't come to necessarily tell it in its entirety, but I must tell a part of it because most of us are tied directly to it.

I know the socio-landscape is wild right now: pandemonium/politics, nations falling/ native voices rising, viruses/colonization, war/science, power/extraction, superiority/nuclear advancement, supreme ideals/bombs for domination, life/growth and healing/futures. Between all this, tucked away within the crevices, is a reality for those of us depending on the Great Lakes for our life support—this reality is the safety of our water.

With the occurrence of PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances), agricultural runoff,

the Detroit River dock collapse on a forgotten hazardous site, and proposed permanent nuclear waste storage, we are becoming aware of what threatens us, and we are developing and envisioning alternative and cleaner futures. I have come forward with both another threat of potential catastrophe, and the alternative.

By now a lot of us are aware of DTE Energy's ploys to exploit customer pockets through a long list of surcharges and rate increases to pay for their ventures. What is not known is some of the other shortcuts being utilized to save and make money. One example is their Enrico Fermi 2 nuclear facility in Frenchtown, Monroe County, Michigan. The behemoth is the largest of its kind and the same model as the Fukushima reactor that melted down in Japan after a power outage caused the spent fuel pool (SFP) to go critical. This catastrophe is still being felt as more and more things are testing positive for radiation across the Pacific Ocean.

The Fermi 2 nuclear reactor was opened in 1988 and in 1993 it threw a turbine, which is used to cool the plant and nearly had a meltdown on Christmas Day. DTE attempted to move forward by running the plant on half capacity, when a group of concerned citizens banded strong and formed CRAFT (Citizens Resistance At Fermi Two), and intervened. After a string of legal battles, some key members moved out of state and CRAFT fell by the wayside. Around eight years ago key members found themselves back here after the Fukushima meltdown and knew they had to revive CRAFT. Since then, we have worked diligently to keep Detroit Edison in check and raise public awareness around shutting Fermi 2 down and protecting the Great Lakes.

The Enrico Fermi 2 nuclear facility uses 45 million-plus gallons of water a day for its cooling process, during which it circulates, treats and releases the water back into Lake Erie. Erie, right? Only the water that comes out of the plant is not the same water that went in. It's now been diluted with waste and treatment chemicals at a 10:1 dilution ratio, making 4.5 million gallons of waste being released back into Lake Erie, per day—this at temperatures up to 70 degrees hotter than the average of those measured along the western basin of Lake Erie. Thermal pollution and wastewater are not the only issue here. Onsite waste storage and the maintenance of the SFP is one of our main focuses currently.

When DTE sought to relicense the facility in 2015 until 2045, making it 65 years old, there was a whole list of compromised issues DTE committed to fix, update and address in the agreement between them and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The problem is that DTE got the license extension based on their commitments to fix the waste storage, and now they are going back to modify that agreement. Currently CRAFT has filed a leave to intervene and ask for a public hearing on DTE's License Amendment Request, which is something that is done when they want to invalidate an agreement with the NRC.

In the original license agreement, DTE has committed to clean up and update Neutron Absorbing Materials (NAM) in the SFP. The old material, called Boraflex, which is heavily degraded, is to be cleaned out and replaced with the updated version named Boral. Now DTE wants to do almost the opposite

by building over it and leaving behind the degraded old materials.

This will be done by covering the degraded NAM with snap-in neutron absorbers, which are exactly that— snap-ins and welds, leaving behind materials which will, and already are, clogging systems used to filter, leading to system breakdown. That is not the content of the future I imagine we want to collectively envision.

So, boom! Did you know nuclear waste is being stored on Lake Erie shores within 30 miles of Detroit? Did you know our local corporate monopoly of a power company is cutting corners? Did you know this is putting the safety of the Great Lakes, and all life sustained there, on the chopping block by going back on this

commitment they made in their agreement with the NRC? Did you know there are alternatives that look like “the light at the end of the tunnel”?

We at CRAFT imagine a world where the Great Lakes are free of nuclear waste. We can see Fermi 2 decommissioned and the stored waste removed from Lake Erie shores. We can see a future where that same power produced by the facility can be produced by renewable energy, preferably solar, on rooftops, distributed energy storage, with community ownership over the grid. This, plus trade school or community college type settings to help facilitate and provide the knowledge for education and training, with just transition principles applied. This would of course be down the line and be a part of a larger collaboration of

communities and peoples. All over Detroit, the metro area, state, nation and world people are working and creating the models while living the futures. For me, that’s easy enough to see if you follow *Riverwise* magazine. We believe this transition for SE Michigan to be possible. Until then we hold DTE accountable in their agreements, including nuclear. With proper support and solidarity, we can achieve this attainable goal and change the current status quo. *Donadagohvi*, until we meet again.



Donations to CRAFT, the shut down of Fermi II and the protection of the Great Lakes can be made at www.shutdownfermi.net.

WPD Camp Will Prepare Young Water Justice Leaders

BY WE THE PEOPLE

OF DETROIT

The world, as we know it, is changing. We are facing unprecedented global challenges. Environmental issues certainly fall within the scope of challenges that we must, as a species, think on more critically. Access to clean water is at the forefront of these challenges, as water is a human need that we all must have to live. We The People of Detroit (WPD) has served on the front lines, combating water access issues since 2010. By involving the community at a grassroots level as well as informing policymakers at a local, state, and federal level, they continue to push for a broader understanding of water as a human right and a sacred trust.

In response to the global environmental challenges that we are facing, WPD is launching a new partnership with Water Justice Warriors and organizations in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin to create the Great Lakes People of Color Water Policy Camp (GLWPC), with initial funding from the Joyce Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The camp is a response to youth across the Midwest who have requested that organizations like WPD create more programming that engages younger water justice advocates and leaders.

“In the realm of environmental justice, people of color are most negatively impacted and often the least engaged,” explained Debra Taylor, co-founder of We The People of Detroit. “Many

times, they have been traumatized with water access, affordability, and contamination. WPD has engaged partners who are excited about co-designing this project. We want to reset and re-spirit the creative and collective thinking of youth leaders to activate their agency and power.”

The GLWPC is designed to develop future water justice leaders by providing them with technical education around water issues and connecting them with other youth leaders across the region. Participants will be tasked with brainstorming creative solutions to combat water insecurity and inequality. One thing all of the partners on this project agree with is that exposure is critical to developing new leaders.

Tracey Coney-Hall, one of few Black women park rangers for the US National Park Service acknowledges the importance of providing options to young people. She is partnering with WPD on the GLWPC project to connect young people to help them imagine lives outside the traditional options that people of color are most often given.

Programs such as the GLWPC have the power to engage youth on important issues in the present, rather than waiting for the future. In addition to thinking about how they can work to support nature, youth will be exposed to other opportunities that move the environmental justice agenda forward. Crystal M.C. Davis, policy director for the Alliance for the Great Lakes, seeks to educate young people on the policy aspects of environmental justice, specifically around water. “I see this more as a

succession plan. We need to bring up and train young people who can take up the mantle,” she says. “There is a need to have programs that bring people together in a non-controversial way. I think water is one of those issues.”

Providing youth with the tools to create and rebuild trust in communities that have been devastated by severe water injustice will be a critical aspect of the GLWPC curriculum. Partnering with the Flint Development Center and its Water Testing Lab (which was scheduled to open in March, but was delayed due to the Coronavirus outbreak) will provide students with the knowledge and tools for testing the water in their hometowns. The young leaders will collaborate with professional lab techs and chemists, further exposing them to new ways of taking control of their lives and communities.

The WPD team and its partners are currently in the planning phase of developing the camp, with a target launch date of Summer 2021 for the first cohort. Ultimately, the goal of the camp is to bring together youth who have expressed an interest in water justice and to empower them with the knowledge, confidence, and relationships to continue to explore future leadership opportunities in the field of environmental justice. As Tracey Coney-Hall notes, “Change can happen, and you can definitely be an agent for change.”

For more info visit:

www.greatlakes.org

www.flintdc.org

www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com

Enduring Connections Sustain Us Through Crisis

BY MEGAN DOUGLASS

There is an old Swahili proverb that has stuck with me ever since I first read it years ago, “Undugu wa nazi hukutani chunguni: The brotherhood of coconuts comes about in the pot.” This old adage conveys the notion that those who may be difficult to convince of the shared nature of our existence, or who refuse to work together under ordinary circumstances, are opened up (softened) enough to unite with those around them during challenging (boiling) times.

This wisdom comes to me once again as, around the globe, human beings face their fears of catching an incurable and deadly virus, practice social distancing, are placed under stay-at-home orders, are being quarantined, and are in self-isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. As government agencies struggle to mitigate the crisis, we are reminded that the answers we seek to the suffering witnessed during this crisis have been long within us. The networks that mutual aid groups have set up so quickly and so thoroughly is a form of struggle against the unjust social and economic systems that have infected our communities.

COVID-19 has laid bare the inability of our current economic and political system to foster a healthy society. Indeed, if a worker who is sick can't take time off to heal or care for a family member who needs to heal, we all suffer. If a family doesn't have access to fresh water in order to wash their hands or bodies, in order to be able to cook nutritious foods, in order to heal, either because it's been shut off or poisoned, we all suffer. If people are afraid to go to a doctor or a hospital when they feel sick because it could literally bankrupt them, we all suffer. When children aren't able to have access to proper meals, educational resources, and teachers and schools don't have the financial resources needed to support them, we all suffer. When our communities are attacked and targeted through unchecked policing and legal practices, and our friends and families who are incarcerated are left uncared for and vulnerable to disease and poverty, we all suffer. And, when we allow corporations to decimate our environ-

ment in the name of profit, we all suffer. This is what the coronavirus is showing us. These fights that everyone has been waging against these injustices aren't just about one group of people over there—they are about ALL of us, EVERYWHERE.

Thankfully, because of the hard work that so many people have been doing for so long, when this crisis hit, these connections weren't hard to make, and calls to action went up immediately. Around Michigan, this work has been invigorating and inspiring. Detroit Disability Power is working to ensure that the disabled community is receiving timely and accessible information as the crisis unfolds; at ROC United, they are working hard to help service industry workers who have been laid off to find resources and get access to unemployment benefits; Frontline Detroit, We the People of Detroit, Black Lives Matters, Engage Michigan, Oakland Forward, The Pontiac Policy Council, and We the People of Michigan, Detroit Action, are all working to ensure that members of their community have access to clean water, accurate information, food and supplies. 482Forward and SE Michigan Jobs with Justice are fighting to bring equitable funding for our schools, infrastructure, and water needs; Michigan Liberation and The Detroit Justice Center are circulating petitions and a list of demands to ensure the safety of those who are currently incarcerated; Mothering Justice is engaging elected officials to host town halls, and offer resources to mothers and parents who are adjusting to a new social landscape; Clean Water Action, NextGen, and

COVID-19 has laid bare
the inability of our current
economic and political system
to foster a healthy society.

For the first time in a long time, people are calling for the kinds of policies and changes that are long overdue.

These organizations and our earth are showing us that other futures are possible, and that much of the work to get there has already been

wages and paid sick time for workers, just and equitable treatment for those who may be on the brink of poverty over one utility bill, a recognition of why it is so important for

As we think then about what it means for us
to move past our tough exteriors, and come

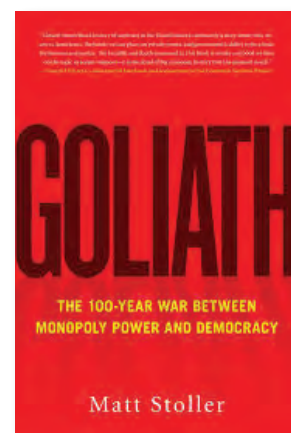
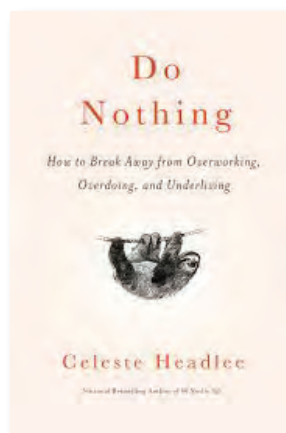
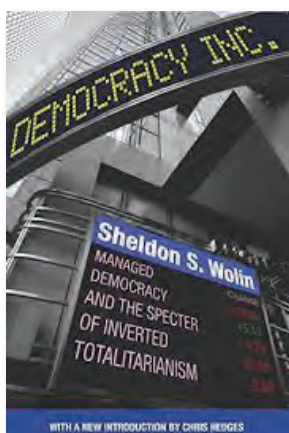
¹Swartz, Marc J. *The Way the World Is: Cultural Processes and Social Relations among the Mombasa Swahili*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9v19p2m5/>

RIVERWISE MAGAZINE 30 SPRING 2020

What we're reading:

SELECTIONS FROM SOURCE BOOKSELLERS

Riverwise supports local independent booksellers including Source Booksellers, Pages Bookshop, and KAN Coop Bookstore.



BOOK FEATURE

A People's Atlas Of Detroit

Edited by Linda Campbell, Andrew Newman, Sara Safransky, and Tim Stallmann

Published by Wayne State University Press, Great Lakes Books Series, 2019, 338 pages



The following is an excerpt of a review of *A People's Atlas Of Detroit*, written by Bill McGraw, a veteran Detroit journalist and co-founder of Deadline Detroit. The article appeared in the online edition of Deadline Detroit on April 14, 2020.

“Detroit’s recent wealth of expensive restaurants, \$1,300 one-bedroom apartments and sidewalk scooters came simultaneously with water shutoffs, mass foreclosures and the appointment of an emergency manager who took the city into bankruptcy. Those disparities reflect what happens when corporate revitalization comes to the nation’s poorest big city.

The disproportion between haves and have-nots in Detroit spawned a significant number of activists in a multi-front battle for a more equitable city. Those individuals and groups have scored some successes, but have little access to money or publicity, unlike the developers and public officials behind the city’s “comeback.” Few of the groups are household names.

But now they have their own book. “A People’s Atlas of Detroit” is 337 pages of maps, charts, photos, essays, ideas and passion. It’s slick, smart, colorful and crammed with data, a valuable addition to the bookshelf of anyone who’s interested in Detroit politics, geography and history.

It’s an atlas with an attitude. The editors proclaim that the book’s contributors, like many Detroiters, “are contesting who benefits economically, politically and culturally from urban revitalization.” Their aim, they say, was to focus on the experiences of Detroiters “and lift up grassroots responses to racism, post-industrial decline and political abandonment.”

COVID-19

“The coronavirus disease is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person **coughs, sneezes or speaks**. People can also be infected by **touching a contaminated surface** and then their eyes, mouth or nose.”

WHAT WE KNOW

According to the World Health Organization

- 5G mobile networks **DO NOT** spread COVID-19.
- COVID-19 **CANNOT** be transmitted through mosquito bites.
- Exposing yourself to the sun or to temperatures higher than 25°C (77°F) **DOES NOT** prevent the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- COVID-19 virus **CAN** be transmitted in areas with hot and humid climates.
- Cold weather and snow **CANNOT** kill the new coronavirus.
- You **CAN** recover from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- Catching the new coronavirus **DOES NOT** mean you will have it for life.
- Being able to hold your breath for 10 seconds or more without coughing or feeling discomfort **DOES NOT** mean you are free from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) or any other lung disease.
- Drinking alcohol **DOES NOT** protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous.
- Taking a hot bath **DOES NOT** prevent the new coronavirus disease.

Nationwide, African Americans are *disproportionately* affected by COVID-19

Vulnerability to COVID-19 is not biological. It's the effect of existing structural inequalities that place more Black Americans at higher risk of contracting and struggling to recover from the virus. African Americans disproportionately work in service sector jobs deemed "essential" or lack the flexible resources to be able to stay at home safely and avoid exposure, significantly increasing their risk of contracting COVID-19. Racialized disparity further leaves many Black people without access to quality healthcare, influences how Black patients are treated or mistreated in healthcare facilities, and contributes to preexisting medical conditions that may cause complications with COVID-19.

Michigan is no exception

50,504

COVID-19 cases have been reported in Michigan

Of those, African Americans were

32%

even though the Black population statewide is **only**

14%

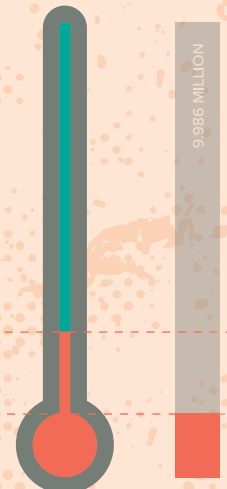
4,880

people died in Michigan,

40%

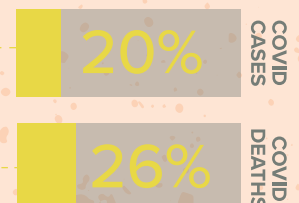
were African American

COVID CASES STATE POP.



Within Michigan, the epicenter is Detroit

1/5 of all cases and over 1/4 of all deaths have taken place in the city.



Sources: Michigan Disease Surveillance System and Vital Records; US Census Bureau; World Health Organization; Bouie, Jamelle. "Why Coronavirus is Killing African-Americans More Than Others," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2020; Pirtle, Whitney. "Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States." *Health Education and Behavior*. April 26, 2020.

STAY SAFE

STAY HOME



Whenever possible, stay at home.

WASH YOUR HANDS



Wash them often with water and lots of soap for at least 20 seconds.

KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE



Practice physical distancing + avoid close contact with people outside your home.

WEAR A MASK



To avoid spreading germs, use a cloth face cover when out in public.

AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE



RESOURCES

In the spirit of mutual aid and community restoration, *Riverwise* has compiled a list of local resources for necessities and support. When it comes to needs faced by people living day-to-day, critical resources and information are emerging from many organizations and groups who provide services and support to people with critical needs. Please share this list where needed—reprint it, tear it out, place on a post, deliver where needed.

GENERAL

MI CovidCommunity.com

To speak to an operator for emergency food assistance, call 2-1-1 or 1-844-875-9211.

COVID-19 City Resources

www.detroitmi.gov

Facebook Group: Metro Detroit Covid-19 Support

www.facebook.com/groups/2554127328195074/

FOOD

For a complete listing of food pantries in Detroit, including phone contact and address, visit online www.foodpantries.org/ci/mi-detroit.

Gleaners Food Bank

Contact 866-GLEANER (453-2637) for community distribution sites.

Capuchin Services Center

Open 8:30 am to 4:00 pm Tuesday - Friday. Those seeking food are asked to make an appointment by calling 313-925-0514.

Brightmoor Connection Food Pantry

To receive food support or to donate supplies, call 313-740-7688.

Detroit Public Schools Community District will distribute “grab and go” breakfast and lunch meals at 17 school locations, Monday - Friday.

Breakfast: 8:00 - 10:30 am

Lunch: 10:30 am - 1:00 pm

For a list of schools, visit:

www.detroitk12.org/domain/5833.

Detroit National Action Network

Free grocery, medication delivery service for senior citizens and homebound individuals. Call 313-288-8433 for more info.

WATER

We the People of Detroit

Distributes water in the Detroit area, visit: www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com for more info.

The People's Water Board

Fights for the human right to water. Visit www.peopleswaterboard.org/blog for updates.

Coronavirus COVID-19 Water Restart Plan

For Detroit residents who recently experienced a water shutoff or received a shutoff notice, call Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency to get your service restored: 313-386-9727 or visit www.detroitmi.gov and search for “Coronavirus COVID-19 Water Restart Plan”.

LEGAL

Need Legal Help?

Visit Detroit Justice Center's COVID-19 Resources: www.detroitjustice.org/blog/covid19

Landlord-Tenant Issues?

Call or email United Community Housing Coalition regarding landlord-tenant or other eviction matters in Detroit at 313-355-3352 or eviction@uchcdetroit.org. Visit www.uchcdetroit.org for more info.

SMALL BUSINESS

TechTown Stabilization Fund

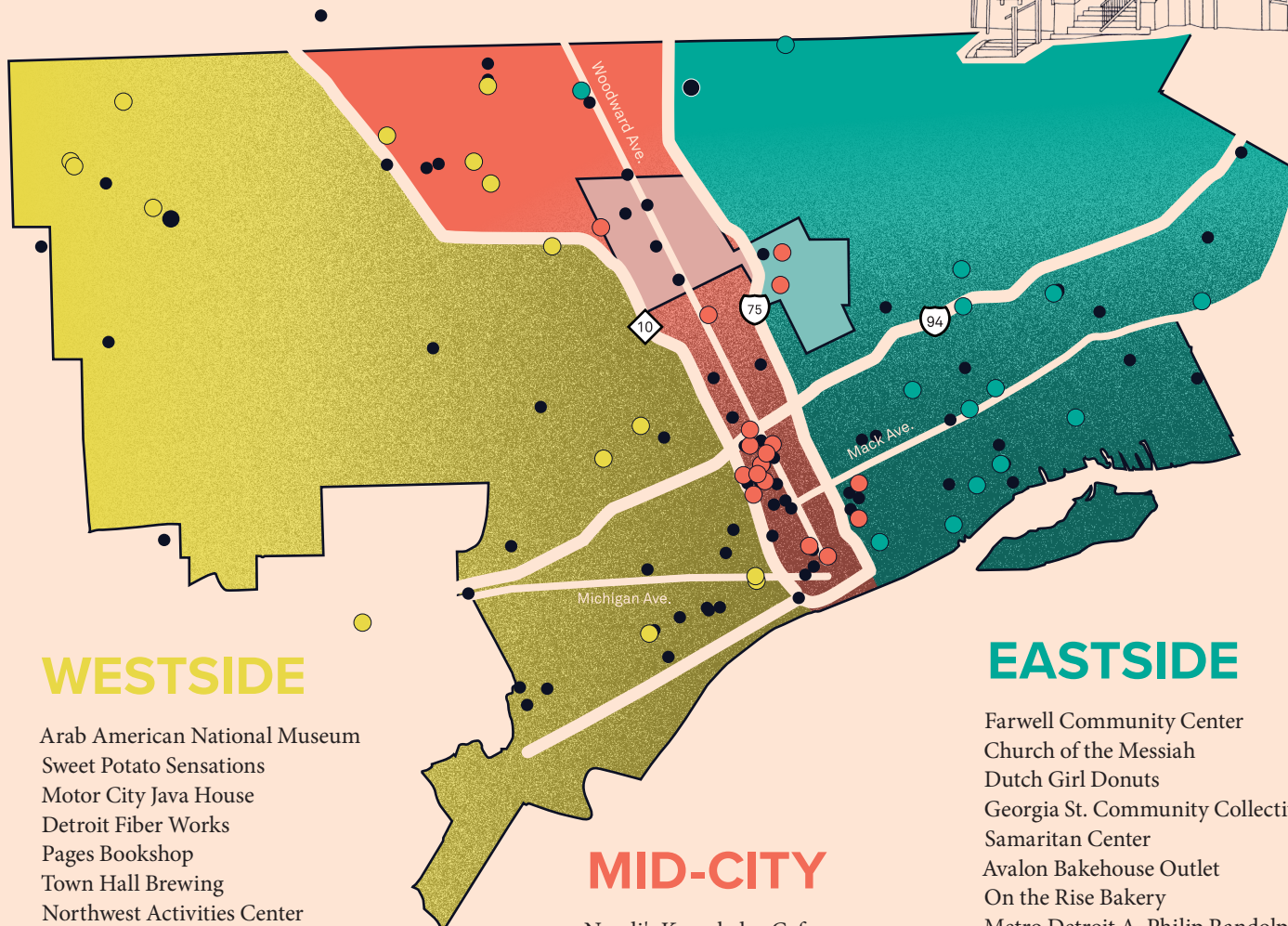
Emergency capital grants up to \$5,000 for small businesses: www.techtowndetroit.org/covid-19-updates



To voice concerns about COVID-19, contact Outlier Media by texting “corona” to 72224. Visit www.outliermedia.org/ for more info.

Where is Riverwise?

Thanks to many individuals, organizations, and businesses across the city, readers can find Riverwise at nearly 140 locations. The locations marked on this map represent just a few of those who play an especially instrumental role in distributing each issue of the magazine. As the COVID-19 pandemic shifts the ways we engage in public, we're also shifting the way Riverwise moves and is distributed: For this Spring 2020 issue, we're publishing a smaller run and focusing on mailing copies. We hope that our Riverwise distribution family is healthy and cared for. We look forward to being able to visit these locations when it's safe for us to do so again.



WESTSIDE

Arab American National Museum
Sweet Potato Sensations
Motor City Java House
Detroit Fiber Works
Pages Bookshop
Town Hall Brewing
Northwest Activities Center
Focus: Hope
Good Cakes and Bakes
Eric's I've Been Framed
Detroit Sip
Dabls African Bead Museum
Shrine of the Black Madonna
PizzaPlex
St. Peter's Episcopal

MID-CITY

Nandi's Knowledge Cafe
KAN Coop Bookstore
Oloman Café
Café 1923
Detroit Public Library Main Branch
Detroit Historical Museum
Cass Corridor Commons
Source Booksellers
Allied Media Projects
Harmonie Gardens
Avalon In'tl Breads on Willis
Charles H. Wright Museum
Hannan House
Spectacles
Central United Methodist
Cairo Cafe
Bert's Warehouse
Trinosophes

EASTSIDE

Farwell Community Center
Church of the Messiah
Dutch Girl Donuts
Georgia St. Community Collective
Samaritan Center
Avalon Bakehouse Outlet
On the Rise Bakery
Metro Detroit A. Philip Randolph
Community Center
Harbortown Market
Lafayette Foods
Detroit Vegan Soul
Rose's Fine Food Diner
Vegginini's Paradise Cafe
The Commons
Mack Alive



Keep the Riverwise Current Moving

10 WAYS TO KEEP RIVERWISE AFLOAT

Our beloved community of Detroit activists continue the hard work of building a new society rooted in value-based politics rather than material-based economics. Please join us as we continue our work of documenting that critical journey in print and, increasingly, online.

DONATE

1 Employ the donate button at riverwisedetroit.org. Every \$1 prints one issue.

DISPLAY

2 You can buy special edition posters of Riverwise covers for \$15.

WRITE

3 Attend a Riverwise Writing Workshop and develop your ideas collectively, for Riverwise or yourself. Workshops now occurring online. For more info email: lexdowntherabbithole@gmail.com.

ORGANIZE

4 Host a small community conversation or block club meeting around issues like water access or other topics covered in Riverwise.

DISTRIBUTE

5 Ask a business or community space in your neighborhood to carry Riverwise magazine.

SUBSCRIBE

6 Join our family of subscribers who receive copies in the mail by visiting our website: www.riverwise.org

SHARE

7 Take a pic with your favorite issue (post and tag us please) and we'll post it on Instagram. Share a Riverwise Facebook post.

SUBMIT

8 Share your articles, photos, poems, letters or original artwork. Help us find stories about transforming our institutions, our communities and ourselves. Remember, what makes this magazine valuable is **your voice**.

TEACH

9 As an educator or as a student, tell us how you use Riverwise in your classroom or organization. The youth perspective is vital as we create a just future.

Find us at www.riverwisedetroit.org and follow us on social media:



Riverwise Magazine



@riverwisemagazine



@RiverwiseDet

TRANSMIT

10 Send us audio clips or join us on the Riverwise podcast on the Detroit Is Different podcast network. Sometimes a story is better told than written. Join us at <https://www.detroitisdifferent.net/show/riverwise-podcast/>.

